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Letter from the Prelate (September 2016)

The Prelate focuses on the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross on September 14, and reminds us that accompanying the sick and elderly in their suffering is a work of mercy very pleasing to God.

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My dear children: may Jesus watch over my daughters and sons for me!

September has arrived, and the Church, Mother and Teacher, invites us to grasp more deeply the fruits of the redemption. On the 14th, feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, we are reminded that the holy wood on which our Lord offered his life for the salvation of the world is a throne of triumph and glory: *and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.*[1] And on the following day, memorial of Mary at the foot of the Cross, our sight is firmly directed to our Lady, the new Eve united to Christ, the new Adam, and her privileged role in assisting the salvation of souls. In contemplating the Cross with faith, we see that “the instrument of punishment which, on Good Friday, manifested God’s judgment on the world, has become a source of life, pardon, mercy, a sign of reconciliation and peace.”[2]

These liturgical feasts also challenge us to consider our daily response to the mystery of suffering, when we confront it on our path. Nevertheless, we sometimes view as “successes” only what pleases our senses or satisfies our own ego, while we see as “failures” the setbacks in life, what doesn’t turn out as we hoped, what brings us suffering in body or soul. Let us strive to overcome this mistaken view, since, as Saint Josemaría wrote, “success or failure is found in the interior life. Success is receiving calmly Christ’s Cross, opening wide our arms, because for Jesus as well as for us the Cross is a throne, the exaltation of love. The Cross is the highpoint of redeeming effectiveness, in order to bring souls to God, to bring them in accord with our lay way of acting: with our closeness, with our friendship, with our work, with our words, with our teaching, with prayer and sacrifice.”[3]

When we see people fleeing from the Cross, which unfortunately happens in so many places, we can ask ourselves, echoing the Pope: “the Christian path I began at Baptism: how is it going? Have I come to a standstill? . . . Do I come to a stop before the things that please me—worldliness, vanity—or rather do I strive to always make progress, seeking specific ways to put the beatitudes and works of mercy into practice? For Jesus’ path is filled with consolation, with glory, but also with the cross. And always with peace in our soul.”[4]

Among the works of mercy, which we are trying to practice in a special way throughout this Jubilee Year, there is one that is both corporal and spiritual at the same time. I am referring to care for the sick and the elderly. This care is not limited to assisting their material needs, but also always includes a spiritual

dimension: helping them in their suffering or solitude to discover continually the opportunity to unite themselves with Christ on the Cross.

Care for the sick is constantly found in Jesus' passage through this world. It is one of the signs of his messianic mission, as Saint Matthew tells us: *He took our infirmities and bore our diseases.*^[5] The evangelists stress this concern in many different places. At times a person asks for this favor for themselves or for a person close to them: the centurion from Capernaum petitions Jesus for his sick servant; some friends place a paralytic before him; Martha and Mary beseech him to come to Bethany to heal their brother who is gravely ill; Bartimaeus cries out to Jesus when he passes by the roadway in Jericho, asking him to have pity on him and cure his blindness. At other times, Jesus himself takes the initiative: *As he went ashore he saw a*

great throng; and he had compassion on them, and healed their sick[6]; or when he encountered a paralytic by the pool of Bethesda and he asked: *Do you want to be healed?*[7]; or when he restored life to the son of the widow from Naim.[8]

Often those in the crowd brought their sick relatives or friends to the Master. Saint Matthew recounts that *Jesus went on from there and passed along the Sea of Galilee. And he went up into the hills, and sat down there. And great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the maimed, the blind, the dumb, and many others, and they put them at his feet, and he healed them, so that the throng wondered, when they saw the dumb speaking, the maimed whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel.*[9]

Our Lord's miracles, of course, were not aimed only at curing people's bodily illnesses, but also at infusing grace into their souls. We see this in the cure of the man blind from birth. When the disciples—following the mindset of the times—asked him if this man's blindness was the result of his sins, Jesus replied: *It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him.*[10]

The book of Acts gives us in various places a portrait of the life of the early Church. Saint Luke writes: *Now many signs and wonders were done among the people by the hands of the apostles . . .so that they even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and pallets, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them.*[11]

Suffering and illness can bring people closer to God, if accepted with

a supernatural spirit. But, if they provoke rebellion, they can also distance people from him. Both in his own life and in the history of the Work, our Father had abundant experience of the effectiveness of physical or moral suffering when it is united to our Lord's Cross. With gratitude to God and to countless people who responded in this way, he said that "right from the beginning we have relied on the prayer of many sick people, who offered up their suffering for Opus Dei."[12] Now as well, our apostolic work continues being grounded on the generous foundation of those who are sick, who strive to transform their suffering into prayer for the Church, for the Pope, for souls.

We have to look after all the sick with care and gratitude, with affection, with both material and spiritual care. We ask God to grant them health, if this is good for their

souls; and if not, that they accept their sickness joyfully, the aches and pains of old age, or whatever they are suffering from. And we ask that they always have the supernatural joy of assisting in the application of Christ's redemptive merits.

“On the Cross, then, with faithfulness. On the Cross, with cheerfulness, since a dedication that is not cheerful couldn't please God: *hilarem enim datorem diligit Deus* (2 Cor 9:7), God loves a cheerful giver. On the Cross, with serene peacefulness: for we fear neither life nor death; nor do we fear God, who is our Father.”[13] At the same time, with the deep humanity that characterized him, our Founder insisted: “physical suffering, when it can be alleviated, we should do so. Life already contains enough suffering! And when it can't be alleviated, we offer it up.”[14]

To understand this deeply Christian attitude, we need to approach it with the outlook of the Good Shepherd. “Only from the affective connaturality born of love can we appreciate the theological life present in the piety of Christian peoples . . . I think of the steadfast faith of those mothers tending their sick children who, though perhaps barely familiar with the articles of the creed, cling to a rosary; or of all the hope poured into a candle lighted in a humble home with a prayer for help from Mary, or in the gaze of tender love directed to Christ crucified.”[15]

Whenever we are sick or suffering in any other way, we should let those at our side know and go to the doctor and accept his indications, in order to apply right away the opportune remedies. Thus we will avoid the “complex” of being a sick person. How often I heard Saint Josemaría

say that, just as no one here on earth is a saint [*santo*], no one is always healthy [*sano*]! We can all go through periods of sickness, including grave illness, and this has to lead us to abandon ourselves trustingly in the hands of God and those who can assist us.

My daughters and sons, let us accept gratefully these recommendations of our holy Founder, since “doing God’s work is not just a pretty phrase. It is an invitation to spend ourselves for Love’s sake. We have to die to ourselves and be born again to a new life. Jesus obeyed in this way, even unto death on a cross, *mortem autem crucis. Propter quod et Deus exaltavit illum (Phil 2:8-9)*. That is why God exalted him. If we obey God’s will, the Cross will mean our own resurrection and exaltation. Christ’s life will be fulfilled step by step in our own lives. It will be said of us that we have tried to be good

children of God, who went about doing good in spite of our weakness and personal shortcomings, no matter how many.”[16]

Let us not fail also to turn our eyes to our beloved Blessed Alvaro, who accepted lovingly and joyfully both health and illness. When we remember him on September 15th, anniversary of his appointment as Saint Josemaría’s successor, let us ask him to obtain strength for all of us.

I know you have been praying for the victims of the earthquake in Italy and for the other disasters around the world: let us foster this fraternity with all mankind.

In three days, in the Marian shine of Torreciudad, I will administer priestly ordination to six deacons, Associates of the Prelature. Pray for them and for all the priests in the world, for the Pope and bishops, and ask the Holy Spirit to fill all of us

with his gifts and make us holy. On the same date, we will join in the Church's joy for the canonization of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta, who had so much affection for the Work.

With all my affection, I bless you.

Your Father,

+ Javier

Torreciudad, September 1, 2016

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[1] *Jn* 12:32.

[2] Benedict XVI, Homily, September 14, 2008.

[3] Saint Josemaría, *Letter*, May 31, 1954, no. 30.

[4] Pope Francis, Homily in Santa Marta, May 3, 2016.

[5] *Mt* 8:17; see *Is* 53:4.

[6] *Mt* 14:14.

[7] *Jn* 5:6.

[8] See *Lk* 7:11-15.

[9] *Mt* 15:29-31.

[10] *Jn* 9:3.

[11] *Acts* 5:12-15.

[12] Saint Josemaría, Notes from a family get-together, undated (AGP, PO1, XII-1981, p. 9).

[13] Saint Josemaría, *Letter*, May 31, 1954, no. 30.

[14] Saint Josemaría, Notes from a family get-together, January 1, 1969.

[15] Pope Francis, Apost. Exhort. *Evangelii gaudium*, November 24, 2013, no. 125.

[16] Saint Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 21.

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